

The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

BULLETIN THIRTY-THREE

OCTOBER, 1950

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF SOPHIA THOREAU AND MARIANNE DUNBAR

WH

One of the events of the 1950 annual meeting of the Thoreau Society at Concord was the announcement of the gift of a large group of letters from Sophia Thoreau, Henry's younger sister, to Marianne Dunbar, a maternal cousin. These letters were the gift of Mrs. John Buck of Woburn, Mass., and Mrs. Benjamin Ellis, Mrs. John Ford, and Mrs. Frederick Hall, all of Marshfield, Mass. The letters have been hitherto unpublished. We are thus pleased to print a checklist of the letters with some excerpts. The manuscripts are to be deposited in the Thoreau Society Archives in the Concord Free Public Library, where they will be available to scholars.

Few of the letters are dated more than by day and month. I have attempted to ascertain their approximate years of composition and have placed them as nearly as possible in chronological order.

Sophia Thoreau was born in Chelmsford, Mass., in 1819. She died in Bangor, Maine, in October, 1876. A detailed account of her life may be found in Sarah G. Pomeroy. LITTLE-KNOWN SISTERS OF WELL-KNOWN MEN (Boston: Dana Estes, 1912), pp. 251-274. Marianne (or Mary Anne Mitchell Dunbar was born on June 20, 1830, and died on May 25, 1915. She was the daughter of William, son of Peter Dunbar, who was a brother of Asa, Thoreau's maternal grandfather. Thus William and Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau, Thoreau's mother, were first cousins. Marianne

Dunbar spent most of her life in Bridgewater, Mass., the ancestral home of the Dunbars. She is remembered by her relatives as "a very quiet little woman" who "led rather an uneventful life."

Checklist of Letters

1. Concord. Sept. 15, [1857.] Invitation to Mary Anne to visit Concord and see foliage.
2. Boston. Oct. 6, 1857. Comments on the weather and Concord friends.
"You inquire after the big squash I suppose I must consider it was indeed duly honored since I saw a notice of it in the Boston Herald.
[For Thoreau's comments on the big squash, see his Journals, X, 49.]
3. Concord. Dec. 31, [1857.] Family health, concerns in Boston. Current reading.
"In October . . . my dear father was attacked with jaundice & became very dangerously ill, for many weeks I was absorbed in the duties of nurse. The good man is now much better & were it not for a cough which is very severe at present I should consider him quite sound-- . . .
"As to Concord we are kept awake by our Lyceum

lectures which have been particularly acceptable thus far. Mr. Emerson gave the first of the season, next came Mr. Alger & then Geo. W. Curtis charmed us all with his discourse on "Sir Philip Sidney." We are now listening to a course of lectures from Rev. Mr. Stone on English literature.

"The Concord 'Dramatic Union' composed of some gifted young people serve us to an entertainment occasionally. Christmas night they gave us some scenes from Dickens."

4. Concord. Feb. 5, [1858.] Concord gossip. Current reading.
"My poor father continues being unwell still."
5. Concord. Feb. 21, [1859.] Death of father.
"It gives me pleasure to respond to any expression of sympathy at this time of sad bereavement, & I would thank you most heartily for your very kind note.--It is two years last Oct. since my dear fathers long & wasting sickness commenced. He has been a most patient sufferer.

At the last he declined very rapidly, he was confined to his chamber but three weeks & to his bed only one week. I shall be ever grateful that his suffering was not more acute & that his nearest & dearest friends were at hand with their sympathy & aid to comfort & relieve him so far as was in their power--

"Through all my dear fathers illness he was borne up by that fallacious hope so often attendant on consumption. I do not think that he realized the impossibility of recovery till about ten days before he left us, but then he was all ready, willing & waiting to be gone" as he said. My fathers two sisters were with us at the time of his death. They have since returned to Boston & I assure you we are lonely indeed. I feel as if there was nothing for me to do now that all anxiety on poor fathers account has ceased. But it is a great consolation to think of him at rest. Oh my dear friend would that I could express my appreciation of divine wisdom as manifested to us all. It is surely safe to trust the good God who so wisely careth for us.

"While I must ever mourn his absence I shall delight to cherish the memory of his many virtues, & I trust that our loss is his gain.-- Mother is at present suffering with the influenza."

6. Bangor. June 23, [1860.] News of relatives and Con-

cord friends.

"Mother and mys. I have been in Bangor about a week . . . I left my brother to the very tender mercies of aunt Louisa & feel a little afraid that the fellow may be harmed by indulgence."

7. Concord. Dec. 27, [1860.] Concord gossip. Trips to Bangor and the White Mountains.
"Early last Spring my dear mother was very severely attacked with lung fever & ever since her health has been exceedingly frail. At present she is more unwell than usual suffering with influenza, which in her feeble condition, renders her very ill."
8. Concord. May 22, [1862.] [Reproduced in facsimile on these pages.] Written on a leaflet of "Stanzas: Written to be sung at the funeral of Henry D. Thoreau." This MS. was given to the society several years ago by the late Miss

Concord May 22nd
My very dear Cousin,
I cannot let another such set without acknowledging your kind note of sympathy for us at this time. Although we have met with an insupportable loss, & great is the mystery of that Providence which has gathered this dark shadow about us, yet so much love & wisdom, is manifested amidst it all, that I feel as if a beautiful miracle had been wrought in the life, sickness, & death of my dear brother, & the memory of his sweet & virtuous soul must ever cheer & comfort me.
I wish that I had time & thought to tell you of all sickness; but so many cares

Sarah Dunbar of Taunton, Mass.'

9. Concord. May 19, [1863] News of relatives and Concord friends.

"I really shrink from telling you what befell my precious mother last Dec. the 21st day of the month. It was bitter cold, all the family, (that is my two aged aunts & Joanna our girl) except mother & myself had gone to bed, when dear mother fell down a very steep staircase, very nearly killing herself. She was deprived of her senses for an hour or two, & during the time she called continually for Henry to help her, her right arm was frightfully shattered. The Dr. administered ether, & set her arm carrying off four pieces of bone in his pocket. It was months before poor mother left her bed. Our previous afflictions, & this terrible shock to my nerves, added to the fatigue of nursing mother has seriously impaired my frail health, & the spring finds us miserable indeed. Mother can walk, but there is no prospect that she will ever recover the use of her right hand. I

would not forget the many blessings which attend me, but in my feebleness I do miss an earthly friend to lean upon, dear Henry was a host so wise in counsel & so efficient in every emergency. Oh it is a great mystery that we are left to live without him.

"Ticknor & Fields are about to issue a volume of my brother's papers. . . . I have been preparing some of my brothers MSS, for the press."

10. Concord. Feb. 1, 1867. Deaths of Aunt Louisa and Aunt Jane.

"Let me thank you for the hearty expression of your sympathy, at the time dear Henry left us. It was fully appreciated.

"As you may suppose must of my time has been devoted to the publication of his papers.

"Five volumes have been printed since his death.--I trust that you have read them, & also the many friendly criticisms which discriminating readers have bestowed. I should like to tell you of numerous touching incidents, proving the respect & affection felt for him by those to whom he was personally a stranger. While the sense of our great loss is strengthened from year, to year, it is a pleasure to realize how many share our grief, & we are continually solaced by the sweetest memories of his whole life.--"

I wish you to realize how feeble my dear mother is. Since her fall she has never been able to dress herself, or use her needle--the right arm being nearly helpless, & owing to weak eyes she is much of the time deprived of reading. Notwithstanding her infirmities, she is ever cheerful."

11. Concord. Nov. 29, 1867. Illhealth of mother and other relatives.

"If you will come to see us I shall be glad to show you some of my dear brother's haunts. Pilgrims from afar often come to visit them. I was spending a day at 'Walden' lately when a gentleman from the West came to the pond to

search for Henry's house. He afterwards spent an hour or two at our house. It is a melancholy pleasure to find my brother thus remembered.--"

12. Concord. April 21, [1870.] Mother's ill health. Current reading.
13. Concord. May 13, [1870.] Personal ill health.
14. Concord. Nov. 15, [1870.] Ill health of mother and self. Current reading. Trip to White Mountains.
15. Concord. Sept. 18, [1871] Personal ill health. News of Concord friends. Current reading.

"My mother is greatly blessed in retaining with rare vigor, all her faculties. . .

"I managed to spend a week with a friend in Cohasset, in Aug."

[Was the Cohasset friend by any chance Ellen Sewall? She and Sophia are supposed to have kept up their friendship for many years.]

16. Concord. Apr. 8, 1872.

"Since the departure of my most precious mother I have been much prostrated, & for the past ten days all my strength has been taxed in breaking up house keeping. I have rented my house & gone to board with the family. I could not live utterly alone. No words can tell the severe struggle it has cost me to part with the many relics which had become sacred through association with all my departed loved ones. But

my house must be emptied. I am sorry that you know so well how to sympathize with me in my loneliness. I long to see you & tell you the particulars of dear mother's passing away, & when the warm days come I hope to avail myself of y'r kind invitation & spend a little time with you.--

"Dear mother was in her bed three weeks. She retained full possession of all her faculties to the last. The vigor & activity of her mind was truly wonderful. Her bodily infirmities she bore as she had done for many years, & the Lord granted a gentle exit.

"A rare beauty came to her in death, I wish you could have seen her as she lay like a queen, bedecked with costly flowers, the tokens of friendship & respect. . .

17. Concord. June [13] 1872. Visits to Boston and Bridgewater. News of friends and relatives.

"In the evening Mr Gifford & Mr Payne called, the latter

was enthusiastic about Henry whose 'Walden' he quoted."

18. Bangor. July 31, [1872] Leaves Concord for Bangor. Emerson's house burns.
19. Concord. Oct. 28, [1872] Returns to Concord. Ill health. Current reading. An epidemic among Boston horses.
20. Concord. Jan. 1873. News of friends and relatives. Current reading.
21. Bangor. July 1, 1873. News of relatives. Current reading. Lectures and concerts in Boston.

"In the spring I decided to sell my house & make my home with my friends in Bangor who are most dear to me. . . It seemed wise to give up all care of renting & keeping my house in repair, so I put it into the hands of a broker, after waiting two months & not finding a purchaser I decided to lease it

*occupy me at this time
that I must refrain. I do
sincerely hope that you &
your father will visit us this
season. I want to see you &
tell you of Henry. My brother
was honored with a public funeral
from the church. I send you
some verses written by his friend
W.C. Channing. Mr Emerson has
an address which will appear
in the 'Atlantic Monthly' ere long
I hope you will see it.*

*Dear mother bears up wonderfully. -- Mrs Dunbar has been
ill all winter & is still very
unwell. Aunt Louisa is as
well as usual.*

*All join with me in kindest
regards to your father and
yourself.*

U.C. Thomas.

*P.S. I know that you will
excuse this hasty note, &
Please write again soon.*

for three years to F. B. Sanborn, who will keep it in repair. Mr. S. is a friend I have long known, & it is pleasant to have his family occupy the house. . . The breaking up selling furniture, & severing myself from every association grown sacred was enough to prostrate me."

22. Bangor. Sept. 25, [1873] News of friends and relatives. Visit to Camden, Maine.
23. Bangor. Nov. 25, [1873] Current reading. Paucity of books and lectures in Maine.
24. Bangor. July 8, [1874] A visit to Concord. "Wonder if you have seen 'Thoreau The Poet Naturalist,' by W. E. Channing. The book has pained me very much."
25. Bangor. Nov. 23, 1874. Ill health. Visit to Maine woods. Paints autumn leaves. "My reading of late runs to magazines. The publishers give me the 'Atlantic' out of respect to my brother's memory."
26. Bangor. Jan. [11] 1875. News of relatives. Christmas gifts received.
27. Bangor. Sept. 2, [1875] Current reading. News of friends. Discovers that she is seriously ill with ascites.
28. Bangor. Oct. 5, 1875. Ill health continues. Current reading.
29. Bangor. Jan. 5, 1876. Continued ill health. Current reading. News of Concord friends.
30. Bangor. Feb. 15, [1876] Sympathy on death of Mary Anne's father.
31. Bangor. May 17, [1876] Postal card.
"For the last ten weeks I have been very ill--one half the time confined to my bed."
32. Bangor. June 13, [1876] Current reading. Severity of illness.
"Accept my truest thanks, dear friend, for all your sympathy, & excuse this apology for a letter which betrays my weakness of mind and body. O! I am so tired. Good-by darling. From
Sophia."

[And thus ends the correspondence. Sophia Thoreau succumbed to her illness in October, 1876, and was eventually laid to rest beside her brother in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord.]

THE FRANCIS H. ALLEN PAPERS . . .

It is our great privilege to announce a second important gift to the Thoreau Society Archives. Mr. Francis H. Allen, bibliographer of Thoreau and editor of the Journals, Walden, Men of Concord, and many other books (See Bulletin #26), has given to the Thoreau Society a large collection of his personal papers pertaining to Thoreau. They are now being sorted and cataloged. A full announcement of the contents of the collection will be made in the next bulletin, and the papers will be placed in the Thoreau Society Archives in the Concord Free Public Library.

The Thoreau Society Archives are thus rapidly becoming an important center for the study of the life and writings of Thoreau. May we suggest that you contribute to the archives? Do you own any Thoreau manuscripts? Photostats of these placed in the archives would be very helpful. Do you still have your notes for any research project on Thoreau? Placed in the archives they may prove of aid to some future student. The care and development of the archives, I think, is one of the major functions of the society. Thanks to the generosity of the Concord Free Public Library we have a safe place to deposit our papers--a place readily available to any scholar. Help to build up the Thoreau Society Archives.

THE DEATH OF HUGH COYLE . . .

Mr. T. Y. Davis of Sterling, Illinois, has discovered in the files of the CONCORD FREEMAN for Friday, October 3, 1845 (p.2) an item of interest to all readers of WALDEN:

Mr. Hugh Coyle, a man of intemperate habits, residing in the vicinity of Walden Pond, in this town, was found dead on the road near his house on Wednesday afternoon last. As he was seen on his way home a short time before he was found dead, with his features very much distorted and in a feeble state, he is supposed to have died in a fit of delirium tremens. He was an old campaigner and fought at the battle of Waterloo.

Thoreau spelled the name Quoil, but the town records agree with the newspaper spelling.

Mr. Davis, incidentally, should be credited along with Mr. Edwin Way Teale for the discovery of the item about Thoreau's fire reprinted in our July bulletin.

Albert E. Lowmes of Providence, R.I., writes that he owns "a slim manuscript notebook, bound in marbled boards, in which HDT jotted down scraps of verse that had caught his attention. A major part of the book is devoted to a long chronological list of British authors. A good many of them are checked, as though HDT had used the list as a guide to his reading. More than two hundred authors are listed. Judging from the hand, I would ascribe it to Thoreau's maturity. It is not one of the college essays. I always grin when I look at it. A card is pasted inside the cover: 'Mr. Emerson no longer writes autographs for anyone. I send one of Henry Thoreau's. A. BRONSON ALCOTT.' And below it, a good bold 'HENRY D. THOREAU.'"

"One wonders that the tithing-men and fathers of the town are not out to see what the trees mean by their high colors and exuberance of spirits, fearing that some mischief is brewing. I do not see what the Puritans did at that season when the maples blazed out in scarlet. They certainly could not have worshipped in groves then. Perhaps that is what they built meeting-houses and surrounded them with horse sheds for." -- Thoreau's Journal for Oct. 7, 1857.

STANZAS:

Written to be sung at the funeral of HENRY D. THOREAU, of Concord, Massachusetts.

Friday, May 9th, 1862.

Hearst thou the sobbing breeze complain
How faint the sunbeams light the shore,—
His heart more fixed than earth or main,
Henry! that faithful heart is o'er.

O weep not thou thus vast a soul,
O do not mourn this lordly man,
As long as Walden's waters roll,
And Concord river fills a span.

For thoughtful minds in Henry's page
Large welcome find and bless his verse,
Drawn from the poet's heritage,
From wells of right and nature's source.

Fountains of hope and faith! inspire
Most stricken hearts to lift this cross,
His perfect trust shall keep the fire,
His glorious peace disarm all loss!



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"Send this champagne and caviar to Mr. Henry David Thoreau at Walden, Massachusetts. Just be sure to ship it in a plain wrapper."

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A Revlon toiletries advertisement in BUSINESS WEEK for Aug. 12, 1950, says, "Most women lead lives of dullness, quiet desperation, and I think cosmetics are a wonderful escape from it."

A. Volkman writes that an Allentown, Pa. archery club is known as the Walden Archers. According to its president, "It derives its name from a lake in Massachusetts!"

L. Hausman writes that Mrs. David Birch of Chappaqua, N.Y., owns the Thoreau family dining table and keeps it at her summer place in New Hampshire. It is a round table about 5 feet in diameter of black walnut with very unusual spool-turned legs. Underneath is pasted its history:

"This Thoreau Table was presented by Lindsay Swift to F. Howard Gilson, about the year 1908. In 1915 Mrs. Swift gave the following account of its history:--

"Mr. Gilson's Thoreau Table was given to Mr. Lindsay Swift by his cousin, Mrs. Annie Foster, to whose mother, Mrs. Dora Foster, Miss Sophia Thoreau (sister of Henry Thoreau) left one-half of her property. This table was among the bequests.

"The table was probably used in the Thoreau family for the ten years preceeding Henry Thoreau's death, and around it is known to have sat many, and probably all, of the celebrities who made Concord famous, especially among them being Ralph Waldo Emerson.

"The Fosters were very intimate with the Thoreaus. The Reverend Daniel Foster, husband of Mrs. Dora Foster, was at that time a Unitarian clergyman in Concord, and the intimacy began at that time."

Mr. Gilson was Mrs. Birch's grandfather. Mr. Swift was the noted historian of Brook Farm.

A STATUE OF THOREAU . . .

Those who attended the annual meeting in July remember the notable impression made by Robert D. Wild's statue of Thoreau, a photograph of which is given above. So many were the requests for copies of the statue that Mr. Wild promised to arrange for the manufacture of duplicates. This has now been done and copies may be ordered directly from Mr. Wild at 17 Calvin Road, Newtonville, Mass. The copies will be the same height as the original--21 inches. They will cost \$30.00 each. If more than twelve people order, the price will be reduced to \$25.00. A \$10.00 deposit should accompany each order.

For those who live in modern apartments and want a smaller-sized statue, Mr. Wild has promised to make a new model 7 inches high, and these will be sold for \$8.50. If more than twelve people order, the price will be reduced to \$7.50. Orders for both sizes should be placed immediately so that the final price may be quickly determined.

ADDITIONS TO THE THOREAU BIBLIOGRAPHY

Babcock, Frederic. "Favorite Classics: WALDEN." CHICAGO TRIBUNE. Oct. 1, 1950. pp. 3,13. WALDEN brings serenity to one's life.

D., P. "Thoreau for Tolstoi." BOSTON GLOBE. Aug. 28, 1950. If the "Voice of America" broadcasts Tolstoi to the Russians, perhaps they should broadcast Thoreau to us.

Deevey, Edward S., Jr. & Bishop, James S. LIMNOLOGY. Conn. State Board of Fisheries and Game, Bulletin No. 63. Extolls T. as a limnologist.

Lake, Ivan Clyde. "Concord Villager: Henry David Thoreau." KALLIDOGRAPH, XXII (August, 1950), 3. A poem.

— The Same. N.Y. HERALD TRIBUNE. Sept. 10, 1950.

Lin Yutang. ON THE WISDOM OF AMERICA. New York: Day, 1950. Numerous references to T.

Shanley, J. Lyndon. Map of Concord. Evanston, Ill.: Published by author, 1950. An excellent relief map of the T. country. Copies may be obtained from the author at Northwestern University.

Teale, Edwin Way. Photographs of Walden. OUTDOORS ILLUSTRATED. Sept.-Oct. 1950.

Thomas, John Wesley. JAMES FREEMAN CLARK: APOSTLE OF GERMAN CULTURE IN AMERICA. Boston: Luce, 1949. \$2.75. This is the first modern book on Thoreau's Unitarian friend. Although biographical detail is not emphasized, it gives a good background for the interest of all of the Transcendentalists in German philosophy and literature. It shows surprising insight into both the man and the times. Unfortunately its use is limited through the lack of any index.

We are indebted to F. Babcock, T. Bailey, W. Conant, J. Duffy, E. Gannett, L. Hausman, C. Hoagland, G. Hosmer, N. Lehrman, H. Severance, J. Shanley, E. Teale, W. White, and E. Wilson for information used in this bulletin. Please keep the secretary informed of new Thoreauviana and items he has missed.

The Thoreau Society is an informal organization of several hundred students and followers of the life and works of Henry David Thoreau. Membership is open to anyone interested. Fees are one dollar a year; life membership, twenty-five dollars. This bulletin is issued quarterly by the secretary. All material, unless otherwise assigned, is compiled and written by the secretary.

The officers of the society are Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C., president; Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass., vice-president; and secretary-treasurer:

Walter Harding
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